

Why This Tragic Spiritual Void in Our Society?

Can a civilised society truly survive without a spiritual dimension?

National polls continue to reveal that an increasing number of people in Britain and continental Europe no longer believe in the biblical standards when defining right from wrong. In this secular age of a 'do as you please' philosophy, the current moral maze isn't surprising. It's an age of relentless pursuit of personal comfort and unlimited pleasure.

During the last fifty years we have witnessed a continued decline in the role and relevance of Christian morality, with no signs of the trend being reversed. This has re-sulted in a tragic lack of knowledge about the Bible, a book which was previously instrumental in fashioning our traditional moral codes and standards of ethics.

The decline of belief

Britain, along with the rest of the Western world, has seen incredible achievements in science and technology, signifying an unprecedented increase in human knowledge. At the same time, belief in God and the adherence to biblical standards has nosedived.

Could it be that our generation is actually living at the biblical 'time of the end'? It was predicted that at such a

time, 'many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase' (Daniel 12:4).

Hosea's description of the society of his day can equally be applied to our day. 'There is no

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

knowledge of God in the land,' he declared (Hosea 4:1). It wasn't long before his people Israel lost their national identity, as God took His hand of protection from them.

On the one hand, scientific and technological know-how is increasing at a spiralling rate today. At the same time, belief in God is dwindling and is being replaced with a devotion to the unproven theory of evolution, resulting in an alarming decline in spiritual concerns, and waning moral standards.

In today's secular society, an increasing number of men and women realise that there is something missing from their lives. There is a tangible spiritual void which desperately needs filling. The Bible, as God's inspired Word, provides the answers that can fill that void in every human being. In this respect, the secular world is pitifully helpless.

Christ promised an abundant life

Jesus Christ taught that 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God' (Luke 4:4). He came to

Listen to *The World Tomorrow* radio programme – see page 3

offer us a meaningful life with an ultimate purpose that very few understand. He was aware of this tragic spiritual void when He declared, 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' (John 10:10).

Although the Bible is the most published book in the world, and the most readily available, it's no longer used as a spiritual textbook in formulating moral standards. In an increasingly secular society, where success is solely measured by material achievements, the biblical mandate for proper moral codes of behaviour is all too often ignored.

Charles Dickens' surprising view

A popular view today is that the Bible is outdated and has nothing to offer modern society. Such a view was foreign to Charles Dickens' thinking when he stated: 'It is the best book that ever was or ever will be in the world – because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful can possibly be guided.'

England's most famous 19th century writer undoubtedly came into contact with many philosophies of morality and ethics, all of which fell short of the Bible's outline of how to live, and its explanation of man's destiny.

Queen Elizabeth II, whose Golden Jubilee celebrations will be held next year, was reminded of this fact at her coronation in 1953. The divine origin of the Bible was impressed upon the new monarch, with the injunction to be 'ever mindful of the Law and Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes'. As the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland presented a personal copy of the Bible to the Queen, it was said, 'We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.'

The remarkable value of God's Word

The world has forgotten that the Bible is God's revealed Word. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah informs us that the moral standards it teaches are good for all times (Isaiah 40:8). This is equally reflected in New Testament teaching (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Many celebrated men of the past believed in the relevance of the Bible. Take the first president of the United States, George Washington. He wrote: 'It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible'.

Rather than being out of date and no longer relevant to today's society, the reality is that the Word of God teaches us how to conduct our relationships with one another. It reveals why we were born and what our personal obligations are towards both God and man.

It is *the* book on personal morality, and provides a proper code of ethics for governments as well as individuals. It's a spiritual manual that all too few governments and citizens alike read and study in this predominantly secular age.

Keeping the Commandments

Jesus Christ humbled Himself to become one of us, a human being, and to sacrifice His life to open the door to salvation for spiritually lost and helpless humans.

Christ came in the flesh to show us a way of life based on the commandments of God that Jesus expounded. When an eminent

Why Study the Bible?

Only one book gives the answers to life's crucial questions: Why are we here? Where is the world headed? What does the future hold? Our eye-opening study course will make the Bible come alive as it leads you through the biblical answers to these and other questions.

This thoroughly researched 12-lesson course isn't just about the Bible. It is about life itself. Why were you born? What is the purpose of life? What is your destiny? What lies ahead for our world, for your family and loved ones?

Discover the answers to these and many other vital questions. Every month you'll receive a new lesson, taking you through the major themes of the Bible. And it's absolutely free with no cost or obligation. Request your first lesson today to begin to discover the Bible's answers to life's most basic questions.

EASTER

Its Origins and Intrigues

The following is abridged from The World Tomorrow programme, the 15-minute radio broadcast produced and presented by David McDermott.

What do bunny rabbits, eggs, chocolate, the word 'Easter' and Sunday morning sunrise services have to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Nothing! Stay tuned to find out why. A funny word 'Easter'. What is it intended to communicate? We are currently surrounded by 'Easter' commercialism – Easter eggs, Easter bonnets, Easter bunnies. Chocolate manufacturers are making a fortune out of it. But why eggs? And just what do you mean 'Easter'? What is 'good' about Good Friday, and why Easter sunrise services?

We have no wish to offend, merely to encourage honest investigation into why we do what we do, and to discover what is behind our traditions and ideas. Many of the traditions we follow, on the assumption that they have biblical basis, in fact have none. If we would only occasionally think to ourselves, 'Why do I do the things I do, or believe the things I believe? Did I ever check them out?'

The first thing that would be learned is that the name 'Easter' does not have a Christian origin. It is the almost-unaltered name of the Anglo-Saxon earth-mother goddess 'Eostre', this name being a corruption of the name of the goddess Astarte of the ancient Phoenicians and Ishtar of the Babylonians.

By this time, you may Does it really matter if there were no God, and specifically commanded in the 'way of the 10:2). But He did say exist! Put in that light, it The problem is, we make we simply assume the Being we refer to as in Easter and never was.

Is it possible that the belief system of the in error? We were born world, replete with its values, ideas and have absorbed. Perhaps when we examine our more detail, whether

encyclopaedias, dictionaries, historical sources, or sometimes just plain logical common sense, they just don't fit.

So why do we do the things we do? Where did our concepts of time and holidays and customs come from?

Everybody loves a mystery, a party trick, a miracle – it's the same now in the 20th century as it was back in the early years of the first century. Show me a trick! Give me a sign! Then I will believe! This seems to be the approach towards anything bordering on the supernatural. The same questions were asked Jesus Christ of Nazareth. 'Give us a sign', they demanded.

Christ's response was not the reaction you would expect. That should not be surprising, since the real Jesus Christ is so different from the commonly accepted image we have so mistakenly assumed. He said this: 'An

Tune in to *The World Tomorrow* on radio

BRITISH ISLES

- MANX RADIO 1368 KHz AM, and 89.2, 97.2, 103.7 FM
Tuesdays at 9.44 pm, repeated Thursday night (late) 1.02 am

INTERNATIONAL – BRITAIN, EUROPE AND AFRICA

- WWCR Short Wave (19 metre band) 15.685 KHz
Tuesdays 5.15 pm GMT (6.15 pm BST)
Saturdays 1.00 pm GMT (2.00 pm BST)
- WINB Short Wave (21 metre band) 13.570 KHz
Mondays and Fridays, 8.30 pm GMT (9.30 pm BST)

NOW on Radio Caroline!

- Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 5.45 pm GMT
- Friday and Saturday 12.00 midnight GMT
ASTRA 1C channel (Transponder 35) analogue
(Go to 'Travel Shop' or 'Challenge TV' and double-click on 'Audio'.)
(To receive Radio Caroline requires an analogue satellite receiver, which is what most people have. Digital receivers are however becoming more common. Radio Caroline has plans to meet this demand with digital broadcasting in the not-too-distant future.)

Also on our web site at www.worldtomorrow.org

Assyrians and

be thinking, 'So what? anyway?' Perhaps not, if He had not us not to worship Him heathen' (Jeremiah that. And He *does* is important isn't it? too many assumptions;

'God' is Christmas, but He

heart and core of the Western world could be into a ready-made system of beliefs, education which we without question! Yet, beliefs and traditions in through

evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man [Christ] be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:39-40).

For three days and three nights – 72 hours – He was totally dead. Life, memories, biological functioning ended, over, finished. After that He was miraculously raised from the dead. Now that was quite a sign! Indeed it was the only sign Jesus Christ gave as the proof of His Messiahship.

A good question

How do you fit three days and three nights between a so-called 'Good' Friday and Sunday morning at sunrise? Get a piece of paper and try to figure it out. It won't fit. It can't work. Christ said three days and three nights, not part days and part nights.

Some say it was a Greek idiom, but the book of Hebrew, not Greek, so hours inside the giant fish.

The fact is that Jesus Saviour, died late on a

and was resurrected from the dead late on a Sabbath (Saturday) afternoon. That was three full days and three full nights.

Easter festivals stem from thousands of years ago and predate Christianity. Jesus Christ and His disciples and His true Church kept and still to this day keep the Holy Days established and ordained by the true God, such as the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. If that sounds strange, it demon-strates our point that traditions have obscured and clouded the truth.

You may now ask, 'Well, if Easter is not a Christian celebration, then what is it?'

What we are about to tell you can easily be gleaned from historical resources, encyclopaedias, large dictionaries and the Internet.

The origin of Easter

The name 'Easter', as mentioned, comes from Eostre, or Astarte or Ishtar – the Assyrian mother goddess who was worshipped by different names in different cultures. Hares were sacred to Eostre (or Astarte, or Ishtar) and were sacrificed to her. In Teutonic myth, it was a hare that laid the 'Easter' egg. Rabbits, being prolific breeders, were also symbols of fertility in ancient Egypt.

And eggs? It all boils down to sexual fertility and egg rites (which are in fact very *wrong*). And no, we are not 'egging you on'. Eggs have long been non-biblical symbols of creation, fertility, renewed life and resurrection. Astarte was believed to have hatched from a huge egg.

Hot cross buns can be traced back to Babylon, where they were offered to the 'queen of heaven'.

It isn't my fault, it's in all the encyclopaedias, even on CD ROM.

Sunrise services

What about sunrise ceremonies and services? Well, you guessed it, they can easily be traced back to origins in ancient Babylon, and are clearly labelled by God as 'an abomination' in Ezekiel 8:16. In other words, something hateful and unacceptable in the worship of the true God. 'There ... were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.'

But what about Christ' resurrection? Incredibly, Christ's literal,

How do you fit three days and three nights between a Friday and a Sunday morning at sunrise?

Some say it was a Greek idiom, but the book of Hebrew, not Greek, so hours inside the giant fish.

Christ of Nazareth, your Wednesday afternoon

Recommended Reading

Christmas, Easter, Shrove Tuesday (called 'Mardi Gras', or 'Carnival', in continental Europe), Valentine's Day, Halloween: Are they secular celebrations or religious observances? Where *did* these popular customs come from? Many claim that they honour God, but can they be found in Scripture?

Just which festivals did God intend for His human family? Which days did He establish? Are they still relevant in today's world?

To discover more about the true biblical festivals and their significance in contemporary society, please request our two free booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. The mailing address and telephone number are on page 7 of this issue.

About the United Church of God – *British Isles*

Many of our readers would like to know more.

The United Church of God traces its history back to the first century. Never large in numbers (Luke 12:32), the Church in modern times was evident in England in the 18th century, with just two known assemblies – one in Bell Lane, London, and the other in Dorchester.

Stephen Mumford emigrated

to the United States during that general time and planted the Church in Rhode Island in New England. Then in the early 19th century a separation occurred, with one branch becoming known as the Church of God Seventh Day. The present Church eventually emerged from this particular branch.

The United Church of God today is structured as an international association, with national organisations throughout the world, including the British Isles. All are associated with the Church in the United States headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio.

A Christian Church

United is a Christian church

in every sense of the true biblical meaning of that term. Its doctrines are founded firmly upon the teachings of the Judaeo/Christian Bible, including the Ten Commandments. (If you would like to know more details, please request our *Fundamental Beliefs* booklet.) The Church enthusiastically supports the traditional family structure, regarding it as the basic building block of society. We present a biblical outlook on life that really works.

We recognise the many problems afflicting our society and are determined to offer hope and solutions to an unhappy world. Our major publishing arm, *The Good News* magazine, is dedicated to this end, as are our booklets *Making Life Work*, *Managing Your Finances* and *The Ten Commandments*. United also offers booklets on issues that reach beyond this present world, such as *What Is Your Destiny?* and *What Happens After Death?*

Prophetic understanding has always been a hallmark of God's Church. A good part of the Bible is devoted to prophecy, and United has not neglected the study of this important subject in its body of literature. Our booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* is one of our most-requested items.

Regional outreach

The Church in the British Isles sponsors a weekly radio programme called *The World Tomorrow*. Currently it is beamed out from Manx Radio in the Isle of Man, as well as from Radio Caroline and several short-wave stations. Please see the Radio Log on page 3.

The World Tomorrow deals with subjects of immediate interest to the population in general, and focuses on biblical solutions and answers to society's problems.

United also has a youth programme in the British Isles, with a successful summer camp in Yorkshire last year, and a winter get-together held near Boreham-wood, Hertfordshire in December.

The autumn convention

Church members gather together every year to observe the biblical Festival of Tabernacles – one of the highlights of the Church calendar. Activities include church services, socials with activities for young people, coach tours to historic sites and other wholesome leisure pursuits. But the main emphasis is on worshipping God and fellow-shiping with one another on the days He stipulates. This year's festival will be held on the Isle of Wight.

In summary, the United Church of God strives to live up to the biblical standards set by the Word of God. Our booklet *The Church Jesus Built* focuses on those standards and presents an accurate picture of the biblical model for the Church as shown in the New Testament.

Readers are invited to write for it, along with any of the other booklets mentioned above. All of these are

Guest Column

The World's Largest Family

As the signs go up around the Greater Manchester area announcing the 17th Commonwealth Games to be held in July 2002, one can only marvel at this enormous family of over fifty independent nations. An unusual family which Queen Elizabeth II has been instrumental in keeping together.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth is reported to have said that the 2002 Games will be a major element in the celebrations of her jubilee year.

The Commonwealth (formerly the British Commonwealth of Nations) was created as a successor to the British Empire as former colonies achieved their independence and joined together in a loose association for consultation and cooperation. It is divided into the 'Old Commonwealth' countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, which were generally colonised from Britain and granted formal independence before 1914, and 'New Commonwealth' states, such as India and Pakistan, which were once subject to the colonial power, but obtained their independence after the Second World War.

Just like all families, the Commonwealth has had its ups and downs, its disagreements, its difficulties and its disasters. Currently the status of Fiji and Pakistan is under review following internal strife. But like any close-knit family, most of the fifty-four members, representing 1.7 billion people – that's 30% of the world's population – have held together.

Each year the second Monday in March is set aside in recognition of this immense family. The theme for this year's Commonwealth Day celebrations is 'A New Generation'.

The Commonwealth Games are traditionally staged every four years. They were first held as the British Empire Games, at Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in 1930, when only eleven countries competed. In 2002, according to the press releases, 5000 athletes and officials from 72 nations – Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, for example, all count separately for the purposes of the Games – will be in attendance.

The Scriptures refer prophetically to a family of nations which has been especially blessed by God (Genesis 35:11). This particular group of nations was prophesied to influence the world in major ways – bringing greater prosperity to every corner of the globe, feeding starving peoples, and even giving Bibles to the spiritually hungry in faraway lands.

In principle, the concept of Commonwealth in the 20th and 21st centuries could well be considered an outgrowth of that biblical family of

Joining the Family Business

Not all businesses are composed of large corporations whose shareholders do not even know each other. Even today some small businesses are conducted almost exclusively by members of the same family.

Spiritually speaking, the Church is the body of Christ and the family of God on earth, of which the Father is the Head.

Christ told His followers to pray that God would send labourers into the spiritual harvest (John 4:35). Dedicated workers that would lend their efforts to gather in the harvest. True Christians should always be about spreading the gospel to others, not just obtaining their own personal salvation.

Christ explained that His Father worked, and that He worked. (John 4:34, 5:17) There are many examples of Christ and His disciples doing the work of God – going about the Father's business (Luke 2:49). We have been asked to do likewise.

Each individual Christian should take these instructions to heart. We should be united in doing the Father's work. We are to be of 'one mind'. There are many roles to play, all of which are vital for Christ's body to function efficiently.

Each individual should consider how to best get involved with helping to gather in the spiritual harvest.

Christ said His followers would succeed. 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father' (John 14:12). Let us all be about our Father's business, a family business helping to gather in the end-time harvest.

Will McLoughlin

Questions & Answers

Q *In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13-14), our Lord Jesus Christ declared: 'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.' Does this passage mean that a majority of humankind will be lost and only a few will make it to eternal life?*

G P U, Mitcham, Surrey

A One basic key to under-standing the meaning and import of any given biblical passage is *the time factor*. God has a basic, overall plan for the salvation of mankind, which He is accomplishing in definable epochs of time.

First came the period covered by the Old Testament. Apparently very few were called to salvation during this whole era, apart from certain patriarchs, prophets and kings. People like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Deborah, Ruth, King David, Moses, Elijah and all the Hebrew prophets.

Then came the beginning of the New Testament era when Jesus was born, called His apostles, died for our sins and was then resurrected back to eternal spirit life. He built His Church and sent the Holy Spirit to its members on the Day of Pentecost.

Though the Church has now continued for some two millennia, even today those being called to salvation are few in number compared to the vast majority of mankind.

In sharp contrast, when Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish His millennial rule, everyone will have an opportunity for salvation. All will be called! Immediately after the millennium will be the Great White Throne Judgement period at which time all who have ever lived without really under-standing the true gospel message will have an opportunity for salvation. This is the time of the great general resurrection documented in Revelation 20:11-13, Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Matthew 11:20-24.

But since Christ first came to earth as a human being, only the individuals whom the Bible terms the 'firstfruits' (Romans 8:23; James 1:18, Revelation 14:4) have been, and are being, called to salvation during this long church age. The vast majority have been unable to understand the true gospel, even if they have had the opportunity to hear and read it.

Twice Jesus said only those that the Father calls could come to Him (John 6:44, 65). Christ spoke in parables so that the majority of the people would *not* understand (Mark 4:11-12). So as it was back then, *comparatively* very few today are finding the road to eternal life. Truly the gate is small and the road narrow, as Jesus said.

Therefore we should understand Matthew 7:13-14 in the context of God's *long-term* plan of salvation. Paul wrote that 'all Israel shall be saved' (Romans 11:26), with the strong implication of salvation for humanity as a whole. Given the very small number of true conver-sions today, this is simply not possible unless their salvation is to occur in a future age.

Judgement today is on God's Church (1 Peter 4:17), *not* the vast majority of people in the world. Its members have the opportunity to overcome and grow spiritually now, and eventually experience the glories of the first resurrection when Christ returns (see 1 Corinthians 15:49-54; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 11:35).

Unknown to most, this precious knowledge has been revealed through the observance of God's annual Holy Days and festivals. For a much more complete under-standing of these wonderful truths, please request the free booklets *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind, What Happens After Death?, The Road to Eternal Life, and The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

Our address is:

**The Good News
PO Box 705
WATFORD WD19 6FZ UK**

Tel: 020 8386 8467

Fax: 01257 453978

www.goodnews.org.uk

Email: info@goodnews.org.uk

E									
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

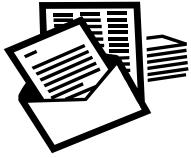
If you have moved... please let us know

Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____

Old address _____



Letters from our readers...

The Good News

We are all touched by devastation at some point in our lives, but having faith in God will always prevail over any doubts that we may feel about our existence in the world. Receiving *The Good News* brings great comfort and reassurance that I'm not alone in my beliefs. Many things in print these days leave one feeling anger and disgust, but *The Good News* brings hope and reason in understanding events past, present and future. *Mrs J D C, Cumbria*

I would like to say that all *The Good News* magazines and booklets have really opened my eyes. I truly believe that this is God's Word and how He wants us to lead our lives. I have been a Christian for six years, attending a Pentecostal Church. But since reading your articles I am now attending a Sabbath-keeping Church.

S C, South Wales

Reader interest in the Supplement

I was interested to read the contents of a copy of the British and European Supplement to *The Good News*, which had been passed to me. The booklets mentioned in the Supplement, *Does God Exist?* and *The Church Jesus Built*, would also be of interest. Also information about the *Bible Study Course*. *Church secretary, Flintshire, Wales*

It is nice to get the British and European Supplement to *The Good News* because I feel it helps to balance the American content.

Reader from Merseyside

I have read the article on 'The Sabbath: Part of Welsh History' in the latest issue of the British and European Supplement to *The Good News*. I find it so interesting that I would like to read more about the biblical seventh day. Would you be so kind to send me a personal copy of the 64-page booklet entitled *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest?* *B P, Sheffield*

Reading *The Good News* British and European Supplement, I am disappointed to note that your UK correspondents are indulging in their traditional pastime of denigrating their country unnecessarily. We know that prophecy predicts the downfall of the US and the UK, but at this time people in both nations are better off than they have ever been! The UK is now the fourth largest economy in the world. London and the southeast of England is as rich as anywhere in Europe.

Most Brits own a home of their own with a garden for their kids to play in. For most Europeans this is an impossible dream. When I commute to London on the train I brush shoulders with city executives closing multi-million Euro deals on their mobile phones. Can this be the impoverished backwater that you refer to in your literature?

R K, Portsmouth

- *We take your point. God has given our peoples tremendous material blessings at this time in our history. Blessings that the Creator expects us to use responsibly.*

However, it's easy to confuse prosperity with morality. The House of Israel also experienced great material prosperity during parts of its long history. As one passage says: 'There is no end to their chariots.' But prosperity did not prevent the subsequent fall and captivity of the nation of Israel, chiefly because of their consistent failure to observe God's Ten Commandments.

Material well-being proved to be a snare to the ancient Israelites because they foolishly forgot that God was the